



**REDUCING  
FISHERFOLK'S  
VULNERABILITY  
LEADS TO  
RESPONSIBLE  
FISHERIES**

**POLICIES TO SUPPORT LIVELIHOODS AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**



# **REDUCING FISHERFOLK'S VULNERABILITY LEADS TO RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES**

**The aim of this policy brief is to:**

**Highlight the different ways in which small scale fisheries currently contribute to poverty alleviation and food security, with a focus on West Africa**

**Propose that decreasing people's vulnerability and marginalization are key ways of reducing poverty among fishing-dependent people without putting additional pressure on fully- or over- exploited fishery resources**

**Show that diminishing fisherfolk's vulnerability and marginalization will increase their incentives and capacity to participate in resource management**

**Emphasize that reducing fisherfolk's vulnerability and supporting their social inclusion will help to enhance the flow of benefits from fisheries and increase the sector's contribution to pro-poor economic growth at local, national and regional levels**

**Outline response strategies and recommendations for national governments, donor and international organizations, and policy-makers in fisheries**

## SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES CONTRIBUTE TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND FOOD SECURITY

The majority of Africa's fisherfolk, whether fish catchers, processors or traders, are involved in small- and medium-scale enterprises. Fisheries activities and assets are usually managed by individuals and households rather than by firms. Even in countries where the large-scale or industrial sector is a significant contributor to national revenue, such as Senegal or Ghana, the small-scale sector may still be the most important employer and the main supplier of fish to domestic markets. Any intervention to manage fisheries therefore needs to work with the small-scale sector, not just the large-scale.

There are an estimated 10 million women and men directly involved in Africa's fishery sector – 7 million of whom are in West/Central Africa.

Fisheries contribute to Africa's development by:

- providing part- or full-time employment and income for many rural and coastal households in fishing, fish processing and trading;
- stimulating the growth of a cash-based economy. Fish are caught and sold on a daily basis; most small-scale fishing is best regarded as small enterprise, not subsistence. Small-scale fish trading is a particularly important means of women's economic empowerment;
- generating revenue for local and national government through licensing fees and various forms of taxation;
- adding significantly to foreign currency earnings through exports and international fishing agreements;
- contributing to nutritional well-being for many consumers, including the poor, for whom fish may be an essential component of a balanced and nutritious diet;
- serving as a 'safety net' or 'welfare' occupation for the rural and urban poor.



### AFRICAN FISHERY FACTS

	Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	SFLP countries	Year
Total fishery landings (metric tonnes)	7,280,469	5,340,106	2,611,244	2003
Total inland fishery landings (metric tonnes)	2,465,733	1,886,636	952,403	2003
Total marine fishery landings (metric tonnes)	4,814,736	3,453,470	1,658,841	2003
Total value of exports ('000 US \$)	2,736,191	1,783,004	608,255	2001
Total value of imports ('000 US \$)	1,009,770	795,205	614,177	2001
Fish consumption per person per year (kg)	7.8	7.2	10.4	2001

- Over 8% of the world's fisherfolk are African – there are more fisherfolk in Africa than in Europe, North and South America, Australasia and the Pacific combined.
- In Africa, fish provides 18.6% of animal protein – above the global average of 15.9%.
- Africa accounts for 24% of global inland waters capture fisheries.
- The value of Africa's fish exports is underestimated because trade across continental borders is often unrecorded.

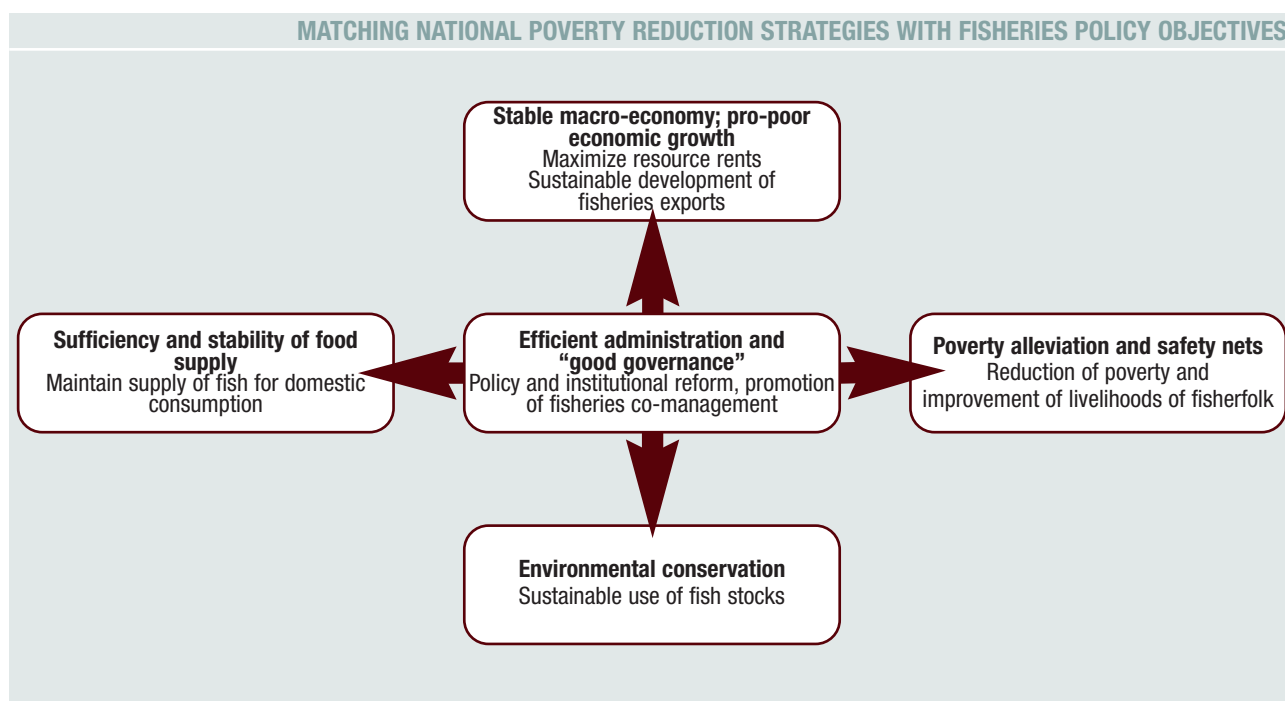
FAO (2004). The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture. Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome.



# LINKING FISHERIES AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION POLICIES

In order to sustain a flow of benefits, fisheries need to be responsibly managed. The resources, although renewable, are finite. If fisheries are not properly managed, stocks are depleted and the incomes of those who use the resource are reduced until they become unprofitable. Thus, the value of the resource (the 'natural capital') is diminished and the many contributions of fisheries to poverty alleviation at individual, household, local, national and regional levels are lost or reduced.

Fisheries management can be guided by several different policy objectives but trade-offs then need to be made between them. For example, a policy that seeks to grant access to fisheries resources to the maximum number of poor people as an occupational 'safety net' will not be compatible with a policy aimed at maximizing the future economic value of that resource. The contribution that the fisheries sector makes to poverty reduction will then differ depending on which element of a wider poverty reduction strategy fisheries policy prioritizes. Too often, national fisheries policies fail to make the 'hard choices' between these objectives in an attempt to address all aspects of poverty reduction.



Allison, E.H. (2005). The fisheries sector, livelihoods and poverty reduction in Eastern and Southern Africa. In: Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction Policies (eds: F.Ellis and H.A. Freeman). Routledge, London, pp 256-273

The need for efficient administration and good governance is at the center of poverty reduction strategies. Fisheries development is no different – and the contributions of fisheries to poverty reduction will only be fully-realized if fisheries governance is effective.

As part of governance reform in fisheries, there are increasing calls for the participation of both government and resource users in the management of the fishery resources. This arrangement, known as 'co-management', is intended to devolve decisions over the allocation of fishing rights from governments to communities. The basis

of fisheries co-management is that fisherfolk have an obvious incentive to conserve the resources upon which they depend and the knowledge and legitimacy to do so. This logic rests on two crucial assumptions: that fisherfolk have the organizational capacity and political power to adequately defend their rights, and that they perceive the future status of the resource as among the most significant threats to their livelihood security. The following section shows that, where fisherfolk are poor, vulnerable and marginalized, these assumptions will not apply.

## POVERTY, VULNERABILITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

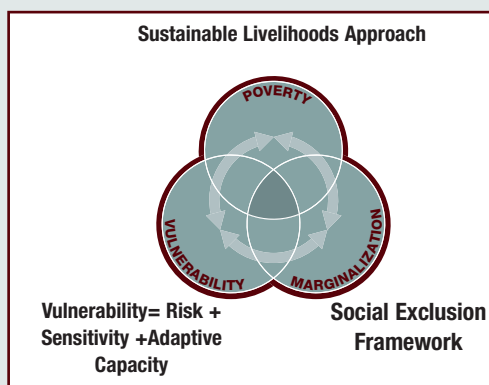
In order to make fisheries management work, there is a need to address the factors that most immediately and directly threaten the sustainability of fisherfolk's livelihoods. Often, these factors are not related to their fishing activities and the status of the resource. Neither are most of them specific to fishing communities, but apply to a greater or lesser degree, to the poor in general and especially to the rural poor living in remote areas with little access to social services, infrastructure and markets.

### DEFINING AND ASSESSING POVERTY, VULNERABILITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

- Poverty is often measured or understood in terms of low income and ownership of limited capital assets. Standardized measures of poverty can be compared to targets and poverty lines. Increasingly, however, broader definitions of poverty are being used, for example:

*"Poverty: a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights"*  
( UN Committee on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights, 2001)

- Vulnerability is understood in terms of people's exposure to risks, the sensitivity of their livelihood systems to these risks and limited assets to cope with and adapt to them.
- While poverty and vulnerability are sometimes thought of as end results of policy failures of various kinds, marginalization or social exclusion is conceived as resulting from negative social and power relations with others; the marginalized are excluded from political, social and economic opportunities enjoyed by other citizens.



- Income and asset poverty, social exclusion and vulnerability are related 'states of being' that people find themselves in. These concepts are overlapping and causation is not always uni-directional. For example, people can become economically and politically marginalized because they are living in poverty, or they can become impoverished because they are excluded from the rights and opportunities available to others, sometimes on grounds of ethnicity, citizenship, or gender.

- Different tools and methods are used to understand these conditions. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) is useful for addressing the multiple dimensions of poverty, often with an emphasis on the assets upon which livelihoods are built – including non-material assets such as education, good health and access to social support networks.

Peoples' vulnerability is assessed with respect to a particular risk such as food security, HIV/AIDS or climate change and the risk-sensitivity-adaptive capacity analytical framework is useful to assess relative degrees of vulnerability and identify appropriate means of addressing them.

- The process of social exclusion or marginalization is assessed through an understanding of the exercise of power. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has recently adopted a social exclusion framework to enable its programmes to address the causes of poverty that are rooted in inequalities of power.

While the concepts of poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion are related and overlap, the above definitions suggest different entry points for development. In the past most fishery development programmes have tried to address income and asset poverty directly by providing improved fishing technology and services. More recent development programmes, such as the SFLP, have placed

greater emphasis on addressing all forms of poverty. For example, interventions to promote involvement of women in fisheries management decision-making processes mainly address marginalization or social exclusion while those aimed at reducing HIV incidence in fishing communities deal directly with vulnerability.

The work of the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP) has provided a better and more comprehensive understanding of poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion among people engaged in fishing-related activities. SFLP studies conclude:

- The income-status of fisherfolk is highly variable within communities. Boat and gear owners and larger-scale traders can be among the wealthier members of their communities. Working as a crew member on a fishing boat or processing fish for sale can provide better financial returns than other share-cropping or wage-labour options. But incomes are often uncertain and seasonal. Where fisheries resources are diminishing incomes are also declining.
- Many surveys use indices of asset status such as ownership of land and livestock and type of house lived in as proxy wealth or poverty indicators. However, the asset status of fisherfolk is not easily comparable to those of farmers because mobile fisherfolk may be quite wealthy

but not own land and livestock (at least in the place they are fishing). Most national poverty surveys do not, therefore, capture the relevant dimensions of fisherfolk's poverty and are potentially misleading.

- Fisherfolk are often excluded from access to other employment opportunities, from equitable access to land and from social services such as health and education. They may have weak political representation. They may also be poorly served by roads, markets and other infrastructure. These factors lead to marginalization of fisherfolk in development processes, which, in turn, undermines their contribution to the local and national economy.
- Marginalization, insecure rights of access to resources and dependence on uncertain production systems, as well as the risky nature of many fishing operations, make fisherfolk vulnerable. They are exposed to risk; their livelihood systems are sensitive to those risks; and their marginalization makes it difficult to adapt to the impacts of 'shocks' and adverse trends in the natural environment and the economy, or to policy and governance failures.

#### EXAMPLES OF THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY, VULNERABILITY AND MARGINALIZATION IN WEST AFRICAN INLAND FISHERIES



- **Lake Volta, Ghana:** fishing communities have poor access to services because the region is isolated from markets and routes of communication. Fisherfolk are also geographically mobile and fishing communities are often of recent origin (the lake was created by damming the Volta river in the late 1950s). This means that both access to social services and communities' own social organizations are absent or weak.
- **Lac Kossou, Cote D'Ivoire:** since the country's independence in 1960, financial support for fishing and agriculture has traditionally come from agricultural credits established by the Banque Nationale de Developpement Agricole (BNDA). With closure of the BNDA in 1991, there are no longer any financial intermediaries for securing credit among the poor.
- **Lake Selingue, Mali:** declining catches and indebtedness of fisherfolk to fish traders threatens livelihood security, as does the low-level of land ownership among fishing people, leaving them highly dependent on the state of fish stocks for income and livelihood security throughout the year.

source: SFLP Poverty Profiles. <http://www.sflp.org/eng/007/pub7/index.html>

The overall picture that emerges is that fisherfolks' poverty, in terms of income and some types of assets, has sometimes been overstated, while their vulnerability and social exclusion has been under-emphasized. Such misrepresentations have important consequences on efforts to address poverty reduction and wealth creation in fisheries.

### EXAMPLES OF FISHERFOLK'S VULNERABILITY TO VARIOUS SHOCKS AND STRESSES

**Vulnerability is the result of high levels of exposure to particular risks or hazards, to the degree of sensitivity of livelihood systems in response to the impacts of such risks, and to the limited capacity of fisherfolk to adapt to these impacts. High vulnerability reduces fisherfolk's incentives to save and invest in the future.**

Exposure to risk or hazard	Sensitivity	Adaptive Capacity
Health: HIV prevalence and AIDS-related illness is very high in many fishing communities	Fishing requires good health; illness results in diminished ability to work	Lack of medical and social services for disease prevention, treatment and care; lack of savings and other assets to cope with illness
Climate-change and variability: droughts, floods, storms, changes in fish stocks	Many fisherfolk have a high degree of dependence on fishing in their livelihood portfolios	Lack of rights to land, no insurance, limited assets (such as education) to assist in finding alternative occupations
Taxation: the fisheries sector is often viewed as a source of revenue to fund local government	Fish are perishable and highly traded and therefore easy to tax	Fisherfolk have limited political power to contest unfair and unofficial taxation; local government accountability to fisherfolk may be limited

## REDUCING VULNERABILITY CAN ENHANCE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

For fisherfolk, resource degradation is not necessarily the most important cause of their poverty, vulnerability or social exclusion. Indeed, in many cases, the fishery is a 'safety net' that prevents complete immiseration or continues to provide better economic returns than alternative livelihood sources, despite resource declines.

The risk of resource degradation or stock collapse may be perceived as low by many fisherfolk in comparison to the exposure of their livelihood systems to other risks. These include ill health or death (particularly from malaria, HIV/AIDS, waterborne diseases, drowning and accidents), theft or loss of fishing gear, lack of secure access to alternative productive assets (such as land) or to a lack of basic human rights.

Small-scale fisherfolk are often excluded from processes of development planning, either because they are mobile (including unregistered international migrants), living in marginal and remote areas, or simply because their role and contribution to the economy is poorly known and underappreciated. For these reasons, they may not be able to gain the support of external agents, such as governments, NGOs, and donor agencies, to help them reduce their vulnerability and improve their rights and access to services.

The overall outcome is that, because of their continuing vulnerability and social exclusion, many fisherfolk currently lack both the incentive and capacity to claim and defend systems of access rights that aim to conserve stocks for their exclusive use. They may even lack the capacity and incentives to save and invest their income in alternative activities in order to reduce their dependence on fishing. Even when rights are granted, they may not have the ability to defend them against more powerful interests.

In essence, increased rights over fish resources can only benefit fisherfolk if their basic human rights are guaranteed and their entitlement to a decent standard of living is secured. Fisherfolk will not escape poverty and vulnerability by being granted fishing rights that they are unable to claim and defend. To be successful, therefore, any rights-based approach to regulating fishing for resource conservation and wealth generation must also address fisherfolk's vulnerability and social exclusion.



# WHAT IS BEING DONE TO STRENGTHEN FISHERFOLK'S LIVELIHOODS IN WEST AFRICA?

Responses to the improved understanding of poverty and fisheries are being developed and piloted by SFLP and its partners. Collectively, they represent a new approach to poverty alleviation in fishing communities. Unlike previous fishery development programmes, SFLP is not simply attempting to improve the resource base, the efficiency of resource extraction, or the fish stock management regimes. Instead, it is based on a whole suite of interventions that aim to make livelihoods more secure, so that fisherfolk themselves invest in improving the resource base, participate in management decision-making and add to the value of the resources.

## RESPONDING TO FISHERFOLK'S VULNERABILITY: EXAMPLES OF POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE PROMOTED AND PILOTED BY SFLP

Vulnerability factors	Examples of policy and institutional responses promoted and piloted by SFLP
Resource decline and conflict: due to weak access and use rights over resources	Developing rights-based fishing; defining property rights regimes for fisheries; strengthening the capacity of fishing organizations; co-management; identifying opportunities for fish stock enhancement and aquaculture
Fisheries dependence: lack of access to alternative livelihoods	Access to land (land tenure reform); support for existing diversified livelihoods; training and support for diversification
Limited access to health services: high prevalence of HIV and rates of AIDS-related deaths in many communities engaged in fishing and fish trading; high incidence of other 'killer' diseases such as Malaria and TB	Awareness-raising of the need to improve access to health services; ensuring fisherfolk at risk are targeted in national Malaria and HIV prevention and AIDS treatment and mitigation programmes
Limited human rights: social exclusion on grounds of ethnicity, gender, citizenship; unsafe and/or exploitative working conditions	Empowering women; negotiation of access rights among settled and migrant fisherfolk; awareness-raising over rights-based approaches, including labour rights, rights of international migrants, children's rights

Note: Separate policy briefs in this series will describe strategies to address these and other risk factors in more detail.



## WHO CAN DO WHAT – AND HOW?

Addressing these issues requires cross-sectoral ways of working that connect across scales from the local to the global and that tackle the interests of a wide range of actors. This calls for a consultative and participatory approach to ensure that the concerns of fisherfolk living in poverty are expressed and heard in the policy process.

### **Ministries responsible for fisheries, national governments, donor organizations and international agencies can:**

- Recognize and support the important role of fisheries in wealth creation, poverty prevention and poverty reduction, national and regional food supply and provision of social and nutritional 'safety nets'.
- Ensure that development plans for the fisheries sector are appropriately represented in national PRSPs.
- Incorporate coastal fisheries sector considerations in integrated coastal zone planning and management.
- Include inland fisheries sector considerations in water resource-use planning and rural development programmes.
- Involve the fisheries sector in policies promoting increased international trade and addressing food and nutritional security concerns.
- Address poverty among fisherfolk by supporting vulnerability reduction and social inclusion.

### **Ministries in charge of fisheries can:**

- Ensure that fisheries development plans address small-scale fisherfolk's poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion.
- Make certain that vulnerable groups within the fishery are identified. These may include women, youth, the elderly, the disabled and those affected by illness.
- Include assessment of poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion in integrated fisheries assessment programmes.
- Lobby for inclusion of fishing dependent regions in poverty assessment and monitoring programmes.
- Maintain and strengthen links with key government departments involved in poverty reduction – e.g. Ministry of Finance, Economic Affairs, Ministries of Health and Education.
- Establish dialogue with national and regional economic policy 'think tanks' to commission policy research on poverty and fisheries.

### **Local/Decentralized government can:**

- Recognize the economic contribution of fisheries in coastal, lakeshore and riparian districts and incorporate fisheries in district development planning processes.
- Acknowledge that the economic contributions to district revenue could be enhanced if vulnerability and social exclusion of fisherfolk were addressed, by working to ensure their equitable access to investments in services such as security, justice, health and education.
- Ensure that a fair proportion of revenues raised from taxing and licensing of fisheries are used to contribute towards vulnerability reduction in the fishing communities that generated the revenues.

### **NGOs & other civil society groups involved in local or community development can become more engaged in the fisheries sector.**

- Large international NGOs, can include fishing-dependent regions in their development programmes.
- Conservation-based NGOs (WWF, IUCN, Wetlands International etc) can incorporate vulnerability reduction and social inclusion in their integrated conservation and development projects.
- Community-based organizations can represent the interests of marginalized groups and identify appropriate means of addressing vulnerability and social exclusion at local level.



# RESOURCES

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